
ADDICTION

During the Coronavirus Pandemic



As routines get disrupted and lives put on hold, the coronavirus lockdown can be tough for people who use alcohol and other drugs.

Under normal circumstances, people dealing with addiction rely heavily on their community and routine for support. The communication might be different but the support is still here.

We have created these tips around support for you:

Wash Your Hands:

The most effective defence against the coronavirus is to wash both sides of your hands regularly for the recommended 20 seconds, using hot water and either soap bars or gel.

The closure of many restaurants, retail shops and community settings have made it much harder to find places to wash your hands.

Utilising hand sanitizer or alcohol swabs, as well as using tissues or your own elbow to catch sneezes, can help minimise the spread of the virus. Be mindful of touching your face, as this is the main way of contracting the disease if your hands are contaminated.

Make an effort to clean your home regularly including areas you have been drinking and or consuming drugs in, paying particular attention to disinfecting door handles/knobs, surfaces and areas that get lots of contact with the public or others (front door/doorbell/knocker/letter box etc.)

Avoid Sharing:

Regardless of the drug (or drugs) you use, be particularly wary of sharing equipment at this time, due to the fact that humans mainly contract COVID-19 through the nose and mouth. Needles, water, pipes, bongs, joints, papers, cigarettes, bottles or glasses, banknotes or straws; **whatever you use, use your own**. Utilise local facilities such as needle exchanges – this will lessen the likelihood of cross-infection or cross-contamination.

Keep Yourself Safe:

ALCOHOL-SPECIFIC ADVICE

Groups most at risk of withdrawal include:

- Individuals drinking over 15 units per day;
- Those who have experienced withdrawal in the past;
- People needing a drink soon after waking in order to relieve shakes/sweats/nausea/anxiety.

The NHS and other services maybe scaling back the amount of help available for alcohol detox and reduction, during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some telephone and online advice may be available. This advice is to help you and your families and friends self-manage withdrawal as safely as possible. Do not attempt to detox from alcohol by going 'cold turkey'. In more severe cases, alcohol withdrawal can cause: seizures (fits), even if you have not had one before; hallucinations (seeing, hearing or feeling things that don't exist); confusion (about where you are, what time it is, who you are with); and poor coordination and balance. If you experience any of these, please call for urgent medical attention

You may choose to take this opportunity to reduce your alcohol intake. If you choose to do so we advise you to seek medical advice. Below are steps to support you as you carry out a safe home detox:

STEP 1: Focus on your daily alcohol intake – keep a diary over three days. Be honest. [Drink Aware](#) have an easy to use calculator to add up your daily units.

STEP 2: Set a day to detox. If you've decided to quit, involve some trusted people and get them to check in on you. Ensure that you have adequate food/necessities at home, **speak to your GP** about your intentions and get any necessary prescriptions (e.g. Thiamine/multi-vitamins/Librium). If you have one, let your alcohol support worker know, so that they can provide web/telephone support. Reduce consumption at a slow, manageable pace.

STEP 3: Eight days is a typical alcohol detox time frame. On day two, try three quarters of your usual intake. On day four, consume half of your usual intake. After day five, symptoms should lessen. If symptoms worsen, **seek medical advice**.

STEP 4: During the Covid-19 crisis, **stay connected with supports via telephone and the internet**. Stay safe at home and limit unnecessary contact. Ensure you are maintaining a good level of nutrition during detox. Consider the importance of taking Thiamine and multivitamin supplements to complement this.

OTHER DRUG ADVICE

Due to social distancing measures and people going into self-isolation, it is important, now more than ever, to have appropriate plans in place, from buying to using. Use messaging apps to inform loved ones/support workers before and after use. If you live with another drug user, take turns to use so someone can keep watch and call for medical intervention in the event of overdose. If you are planning to use opioids, ensure you have access to Naloxone.

Keep Calm:

When we are facing a crisis of any sort, fear and anxiety are inevitable; they are normal, natural responses to challenging situations infused with danger and uncertainty. So, the single most useful thing anyone can do in any type of crisis – coronavirus-related or otherwise – is to focus on those things that can be controlled.

- Acknowledge your thoughts. It is ok to share your concerns with the people that you trust – doing so could help them too. You could try a charity helpline or webchat, for example, such as Lifeline or the Samaritans.
- If you are prone to [panic attacks](#) or [flashbacks](#), establish a safe space in your home that you can go to when feeling uncomfortable or nervous.

Connect back to your body. You might have your own methods of slowing your breathing but you can press your fingertips together, count in for seven and out for 11– whatever works for you.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy has more information on [how to cope if you're feeling anxious about coronavirus](#).

Stay Connected:

Maintaining healthy relationships with people is important for your mental wellbeing. Self-isolation doesn't mean emotional isolation. Many people in your communities are finding the current situation difficult, so staying in touch could help them too.

- Try to make plans to chat with people or groups you'd normally speak with in person. Video and phone calls, instant messages and texts are all good ways of connecting with people during these uncertain times.
- You could even make a plan to watch a show or a film or read a book separately, then chat about it with your friends later on.
- If you're part of a support group; team or group communications are useful for receiving updates and can also serve as an informal support network.
- If you're going online more than usual or seeking peer support on the internet, it's important to look after your online wellbeing. Mind has published guidance for good [online mental health](#), which provides advice and helps you protect yourself.

If you are worried about becoming lonely, this is perfectly understandable. Listen to the radio or podcasts, talk on the phone, chat with loved ones online. Working on relationships with friends, family and colleagues will help build positive thoughts and banish negative ones.

Services and Outreach:

Public Health Agency NI has published a directory of services, including Addiction NI. This directory is available [here](#).

Please be aware that these services may be operating in different ways, due to the current public health situation.

If you are having trouble navigating the above directory, you can call **Addiction NI** on **028 9066 4434**.

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